

# Influence of Family Relationships on the Academic Performance of Children in Primary Schools in Kenya: A Case of Kianjiru Zone in Embu County

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## Abstract

One of the key emphases of the Kenya Vision 2030 is education and training. It suggests education and training as a vital strategy to develop Kenya to be a middle-income economy. Family factors have been pin pointed as playing a significant role in enhancing the academic performance of children in schools worldwide. This research investigated the influence of family relationship on the academic performance of pupils in Kianjiru zone, in Embu County, Kenya. This was necessitated by the poor performance of pupils in the said area in the national examinations. The study employed the Descriptive Survey Design to collect information. The target population was 458 Standard seven and eight pupils in Kianjiru zone from where a sample size of 88 pupils was drawn. The data was collected using questionnaires for pupils that were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented using frequencies, percentages. Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21 was used to aid in generating a summary of results. The study established that families play a vital role in the pupils' learning and that the efforts of the parents are important in improving the academic performance of the children. It further established that children's academic performance is affected by parental responsibilities such as providing them with learning materials, helping them do their homework, doing follow-up of their school work and attending school meetings. A notable thing however was that differences in educational background of parents did not make any significant difference in the academic achievement of the children. The recommendations of the study were that the parents should be sensitized on the need of their involvement in the children's learning. This can be by the school management organizing seminars or meetings to enlighten the parents on the importance of creating a good learning environment at home.

**Keywords:** Kenya; Family relationships; Children's academic performance; Primary schools; Home learning environment.

## 1. Introduction

Good academic performance in education guarantees skilled and dynamic citizens, thus a prosperous nation. The first President of the Republic of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere saw education as the most ideal tool of liberating both the individual and the society, the most reliable tool of developing a nation (Hinzen & Hundsdorfer, 1982). According to Nyerere (1969), education creates a self-reliant person in the society (a creator not creature), who upon completion of the studies is able to create employment in his/her own society. He said that "education is not a way to escape poverty, it is a way of fighting it". This is an important saying for the African continent where poverty remains the greatest impediment to human development to date (Kagema, 2016).

The Kenya's Vision 2030 inaugurated in 2008 as the country's development blueprint for the period 2008 to 2030, whose aim was to transform Kenya into an industrializing middle-income

Country, providing a high quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030, singles out education as one of the main ways through which this transformation will be achieved (Kenya Vision 2030, p. 16). One of the key aspects of the social pillar of this vision is education. It points out that education and training are fundamental in ensuring that Kenya becomes a middle-income economy by 2030. It emphasizes that, "Under education and training, Kenya will provide globally competitive quality education, training and research to her citizens for development and enhanced individual well-being" (Kenya Vision 2030, p.16). The specific strategies to achieve this will be integrating early childhood to primary education, reforming secondary curricula, modernizing teacher training and strengthening partnerships with the private sector (Kenya Vision 2030, p. 16). What the Vision however fails to acknowledge is that the family, the social unit where the citizens are born and raised will play a pivotal role in building a prosperous nation. Cardinal Sean Brady regards the family as the foundation of the society (Brady, 2016), while Stephen (2012) sees it as the atom of the society. This shows the crucial role that the family plays in the advancement of the society or a nation. As Teckie (2015), explains, the attitudes and behaviours learned in the home have a direct bearing on the order, prosperity and peace in our communities and the world at large. In this regard, we undertook to investigate how family relationships influence the academic

performance of our children.

Noting the importance of education to the Kenyan economy it would be useful to identify those factors that affect children and their academic performance. Identifying such factors is essential in ensuring that the ministry of education, relevant government bodies and other stakeholders work out strategies that will help develop the education system in our country with the aim of producing citizens that are well equipped for building a prosperous nation.

Existing literature identifies home attributes as essential factors affecting children's achievements and thus the long term outcomes of the children (Glanz 2002, Graetz 2005, Jeynes 2002). Home factors are of great importance in shaping the performance of children in schools worldwide. Notably, academic performance is usually the result of support and motivation that children get from their parents/guardians and the people they usually interact with in their initial stages of life. Research has been conducted on the factors contributing to a pupil's performance at different study levels. Glanz (2002), for example, suggested "Pupils educational success contingent heavily on home status of his/her parents/guardians in the society". Considine and Zappala (2002), also affirm that the parent's income status positively affects the child's test score in examination. They contend that the parents' economic condition which includes their academic and professional qualification, revenue and occupational affiliations are also associated with the academic gain of their children. Therefore, the academic achievement of children is contingent upon parents' economic condition. So the children belonging to the parents or guardians of higher economical backgrounds will perform better than children associated with families of low economic backgrounds. Home factors of children are generally determined by combining parents' qualification, occupation and income standard (Jeynes, 2002).

The success in an educational institution is measured by the academic performance of the learners (Amunga, et.al. 2010). Over the years, the need of children doing well in school has become a major concern of parents, legislators, teachers, counselors and psychologists. According to Adeyemo (2006), parents devote a lot of resources to their children's education because they believe that good academic performance provides a stable future for them. Also, Jeynes (2002) opines that many educational authorities have sought to find out reasons for the downward trend in the academic performance of children in schools. In Kianjiru Zone, Embu County, the area that we selected for this particular study, it is noted that academic achievement of children may not only depend on the quality of schools and the teachers, but also the extent of home-based factors that are believed to have a vital role to play in academic achievement the children. Children are more likely to have better academic achievement levels and improved behavior when the home factors are favourable (Bryan, 2005).

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

This study was conducted to examine the influence of family relationships on academic performance of children in primary schools in Kianjiru Zone.

## **3. Methodology**

The study employed the descriptive survey research design. The design was relevant to this study because it enabled the researchers to describe the state of affairs in schools by collecting data without manipulating variables. The target population for this study was all the 458 pupils in public primary schools in Kianjiru zone, Mbeere South Sub-county. A sample size of 19% is sufficient for the study considering the degree of variability, in which the population did not have a high level of variability. The sample constituted 4 standard seven pupils and 4 standard eight pupils from each school in 11 schools in Kianjiru zone. Simple random sampling was used in selecting the 11 schools, with 8 pupils participating per school. The sample size had thus 88 respondents. We believed that children in classes seven and eight are more mature to understand what is happening. We designed a questionnaire which was to be filled by the respondents. This was suitable for collecting data for research because it was appropriate for collecting a lot of information over a short period of time. Reliability of the instruments was estimated by use of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and a correlation coefficient of 0.816 was obtained. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including percentages and frequency counts with the aid of SPSS version 21.0. The analyzed data were presented on frequency tables.

## **4. Results and Discussions**

The following are the results of the study and the discussions of the results

### **4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

This section presents a brief description of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The study established that the majority (55%) of the respondents were aged between 10 and 13 years, while 30% of the respondents were age between 14 and 16 years. The study further established that 15% of the respondents were aged 17 years and above. The study established that the majority (58%) of the respondents were female while 42% were male. This is against the common belief that more boys than girls have access to education. In fact the girl-

child has amid numerous challenges rejuvenated herself and she is in many ways doing better than the boy-child.

The study established that the majority (56%) of the respondents were in class seven while another 44% were in class eight. This is a recommendable trend as it shows that there is an increase in enrolment from the previous year. The majority (31.8 %) of the children who sat for the end of first term exam (April 2017) scored D grade, 26.1% scored E grade and 20.5% scored grade C. The data further revealed that 12.5% scored B grade while only 9.1% pupils scored A grade. This indicates that there is generally poor academic performance of the children in primary schools in Kianjiru. Glanz (2002) attributes the cause of poor academic performance of pupils to a combination of personal and institutional factors. The Personal factors include the level of individual's intelligence, knowledge and ability, while Institutional factors are family or parental influence. The study sought to investigate how family relationships influence the academic performance of the children in primary schools. The findings are discussed in section 4.2 below.

#### 4.2 Influence of Family Relationships on Academic Performance of Children in Public Primary Schools

The study further sought to establish whether the pupils came from families with single or complete families. The responses are presented on the table 1 below.

**Table 1: Status of the Family**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	66	75
No	22	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100</b>

The study established that the majority (75%) of the respondents indicated that they came from complete nuclear families with both parents, while 25% were not from such families. The study further established that 30% of the children that did not come from complete nuclear families lived with single parents, while 70% of them were living with their grandparents or other relatives.

The study further sought to establish how the family relationship affected the performance of the children in the primary schools. The responses are presented on the likert scale below as Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D); Neutral (N) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The responses are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Effects of Family Relationship on Performance of the Pupils**

Statement	Response in percentages				
	SD	D	N	A	SA
Having good family relationship encourages me to have high goals in education.	0	2.5	12.5	40	45
My parents show concern over my academic performance.	5	10	10	50	25
I receive help from other family members when doing homework at home.	0	12.5	12.5	55	20
Families are the conducive environment for the development of the virtues which humanize the pupil's life hence academic performance.	5.6	1.7	8.7	49.8	18.6
The emerging family structures may have an influence on academic performance' as pupils depend on the family emotional and material support.	11.2	1.1	4.3	63.5	16.1
Family provides the environment where the pupil learns to use their faculties and understand and cope with the physical world.	10.6	3.6	6.8	62.9	13.0
The structure of a family has been changing from the traditional family structure comprising of parents and pupils to other forms of family structures that provides alternative dependence system.	11.2	1.7	4.9	64.8	10.6
The family relationship probably has the greatest influence on the pupil's future life than any other agent	13.0	7.3	2.4	67.3	6.8
The efficacy of a family influence for academic performance is determined to a large degree by a pupil's family relationship.	4.3	9.3	1.2	62.9	17.4
Academic performance is achieved only if family relationship resources can be accessed to maximize the association between family influences and outcomes.	9.3	5.5	6.8	54.2	19.3

The study established that the majority (75%) of the respondents indicated that they came from complete nuclear families with both parents, while 25% were not from such families (see table 1). Existing literature identifies home attributes as essential factors affecting pupils' achievements and thus the long term outcomes of the children (Glanz 2002, Graetz 2005, Jeynes 2002).

Various studies have been conducted on the factors contributing to the pupils' performance at different study levels. For example, Glanz (2002) argues that the "Pupils educational success contingent heavily on home status of his/her parents/guardians in the society". The findings in this study showed that the majority of the respondents, strongly agreed (40%) or agreed (45%) that having a good family relationship helped in their academic performance. The reason is that the academic performance is usually determined by the support and

motivation that pupils get from the parents/guardians and the people they interact with in their initial stages of life.

Home is the first level of socialization where important interactions happen with parents, care-givers, friends, siblings, and others in the community (Glanz, 2002). The study further established that another 25% strongly agreed that their parents showed concern over their academic performance, and 50% agreed. Those that disagreed or remained neutral over the role of good family relationship were only about 15% combined. This is a clear indication that the family plays an important role in the academic performance of the children. Thus the home continues to exercise a strong influence over the pupil's life and academic performance in school. It has to be noted that homes differ in terms of their significances in the social orders. For instance, some have more prestige and money while some have wider experience and knowledge of how to operate within the society or school environment (Constatine, 2005).

The study further established that 55% of the respondents indicated that they received help from their family members when doing homework at home, and thus this had an impact on their performance. Interactions between children and adults are seen as "the primary medium by which literacy is acquired" (Collins, 2007). Interactions with others around (Bryan, 2005), as well as general talk about events not present (engagement in decontextualized language) have been shown to play key roles in pupil's literacy development (Bandura, 2007).

The study further established that families are the conducive environment for the development of the virtues which humanize the children's life hence academic performance, as was revealed by 49.8% of the respondents. The training provided in the home is practical rather than theoretical. It provides the most conducive environment for the development of the virtues which humanize the pupil's life hence academic performance (Bryan, 2005). The study further established that the emerging family structures may have an influence on academic performance as pupils depend on the family's emotional and material support as was revealed by 63.5% of the respondents. The study established that the family provided the environment where the child learns to use their faculties and understand and cope with the physical world as was revealed by 62.9% of the respondents.

Bali et. al. (2008), notes that better-educated families are more likely to consider the quality of the local schools when selecting a neighborhood in which to live. Once the child enters the school, educated families are also more likely to pay attention to the quality of the children's teachers and may attempt to ensure that the children are adequately served. The study further established that Healthy family relationships, love of the dearest people, understanding and care of everybody are needed in this children's life as was indicated by 64.2% of the respondents. High parental expectations, more parental attention to and effort towards pupil education help raise pupil academic performance (Bradley, et. al. 2001).

The majority of the respondents (64.8%) indicated that the structure of a family has been changing from the traditional family structure comprising of parents and children to other forms of family structures that provides alternative dependence system. The study established that the family relationship has the greatest influence on the child's future life than any other agent, as was confirmed by 67.3% of the respondents. In a family socialization perspective, it is proposed that the absence of a parent is probably associated with a decrease in total parental involvement, which in turn is related to poorer school outcomes (Balli, et. al. 2008).

Good family relationships provide a favourable home environment that entails parent encouragement that proves to be catalyst in boosting, maintaining achievement and motivation among the pupils that in turn influence their academic performance. This was confirmed by 64.8% of the respondents. The study further established that the efficacy of a family influence for academic performance is determined to a large degree by the child's family relationship as was revealed by 62.9% of the respondents. Children need a pleasing and interesting environment, characterized by human care particularly by the mother and at the same time providing various experiences and stimulations (Caldwell, 2002).

The study established that the academic performance is achieved only if family relationship resources can be accessed to maximize the association between family influences and outcomes, as was revealed by 54.2% of the respondents. A Pearson correlation between effects of family relationships and performance of the children was computed and the results are shown in table 3 below.

**Table 3. Pearson Correlation between Family Relationships on Academic Performance of the Children**

			Performance of the Children	
Family variables	Relationship	Pearson Correlation	1	.737**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
		N	88	88

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The study established that the strength of relationship between Family Relationship variables and Performance of the children was high ( $r = 0.737$ ) and the correlation coefficient was significantly high as indicated by  $P < 0.05$ . This implies that 54.32% ( $r^2 = 0.737^2$ ) of the variations in the Family Relationship variables negatively affected Performance of the children. According to (Balli et al. 2008), analysis on the relations

between families and academic performance also need to consider the children's family structures. It is generally acknowledged that family relationship is the most powerful influence in determining the child's academic motivation and achievement.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, families play a vital role in the children's achievements in life, especially their academic excellence. The efforts of the parents are thus important in improving the performance of the children in schools. Based on the findings of this study, it can be deduced that the children's academic performance is affected by parental factors which include providing them with learning materials, helping them to do their homework, doing follow-up of their schoolwork and attending their school meetings.

## 6. Recommendations

We make recommendations that the school managements should hold meetings with the parents/guardians to sensitize them on the need of their involvement in the children's learning. They should also organize seminars and educate the parents on the importance of creating a good home learning environment. Learning environments at home should be made conducive by the parents to promote the learning while the children are at home. This will help in improving their academic performance.

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